

Varian House, 277 VanCortlandt Ave,
New York City.

Bronx Co.

HABS No. 4-23

HABS
NY,
3-BRONX,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

District No. 4
Southern New York State

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer,
25 West 45th Street, New York City.

HABS
NY,
3 BRONX,
1. 2

THE ISAAC VARIAN HOMESTEAD

277 Van Cortlandt Ave., cor. Bainbridge Ave.,
Borough of The Bronx, New York City

Location, Date and History

The Isaac Varian homestead, also known as the Valentine House, at Van Cortlandt Avenue and the old Woodlawn Road (now Bainbridge Avenue), was erected in 1775-6, while an old wing, now destroyed, dated back to 1770.

Stephen Jenkins makes reference to the house in his Story of the Bronx, 1912, p.357, as follows: "To the west of the reservoir [the small oval reservoir situated between Mosholu Parkway and Gun Hill Road], at Van Cortlandt Street and Woodlawn Road [now Bainbridge Ave], still stands the old Valentine House of Heath's attack, which was for many years the homestead of the Varian family. The old farm was cut up into building lots in April, 1905." The present owner, Mr. William F. Beller, acquired the house in 1906. Prior to that, he says, it was always owned by the Varian family.

Isaac Varian, the first of the name in America (who died at his residence on Bowery Lane, N.Y. City, about 1800), had six children, all born in New York, the youngest being Isaac Varian (1740-1820), a butcher like his father, who accumulated a landed estate both in New York and Westchester County, and died on one of his properties in that county. Letters of administration were issued to his son of the

The Isaac Varian Homestead

same name through the Surrogate at White Plains. It was the second Isaac probably, who first lived in this house and possibly built it. (Briggs, The Book of the Varian Family, 1881, pp. 20,21,50.)

An interesting bit of Revolutionary history surrounds the place: "An encounter occurred here in 1777 between the British and the Americans, in which the Continentals drove their foes out of this house and along the Boston Post Road to Fort Independence.

"On the 17th of January, 1777, General Heath, in compliance with General Washington's orders, began an attack against Fort Independence. It was intended by this means, even if the fort was not taken, to cause the British to withdraw some of their troops from New Jersey and Rhode Island. General Lincoln advanced by the Albany Post Road to the heights above the present Van Cortlandt Park; General Scott came from Scarsdale to the vicinity of the Valentine house on the Boston Road, between Williamsbridge and Kingsbridge, while Generals Wooster and Parsons marched from New Rochelle over the Boston Road.

"The three divisions arrived at the enemy's outpost just before sunrise. Lincoln captured the outpost in the front at 'Upper Cortlandt's.' Heath ordered the cannonade of the Valentine House, if the guard resisted, and he stationed two hundred and fifty men between the house and Fort Indepen-

The Isaac Varian Homestead

dence to prevent the guard from retreating to the fort. Two mounted British pickets were espied fleeing to give the alarm. One was captured, but the other escaped and alarmed the British outposts, who ran for the fort. They were fired upon by the Americans, and one of them was taken prisoner." (Cook's The Borough of The Bronx, 1913, pp. 146, 147; also Jenkins' The Story of The Bronx, 1912, p. 157, and view of the house opposite p. 131.)

Architectural Description

The following description of the old place is taken from the field-notes of James Gambaro, Architect, N.Y. City, made during the present survey:

"There was at one time a stone extension on the west side which was used as a kitchen. This was approximately 21 feet long (east to west), 32½ feet wide (north to south), and 20 feet high. A porch about 6½ feet wide ran along the north side. The south wall was set back about 6 feet from south wall of main portion. Due to its unsafe structural condition, this extension was demolished a few years ago. All the stone has been buried on the spot. There was a stairway leading from this extension at the south wall to the cellar of the main portion. This was replaced in 1910 by a new stone stairway at the south front.

"Windows at first and second floors are double hung, set back about two inches from the face of the wall, and are splayed

The Isaac Varian Homestead

on the inside. Stone-work at window heads is supported by a wood lintel 8 inches deep with 6-inch bearing at each end. Some of these have been replaced by steel lintels. Most of the cellar windows were added about 1910.

"The original entrance porch was replaced in 1910, the present owner says, by one which was an exact replica of the original design. Door and sidelights were installed in 1910. The original entrance door is now stored in attic. The Dutch door at the rear of the hall is original.

"Original floors are oak boards of widths varying from 12 to 17 inches, and are laid, running east to west. The southeast room has new $4\frac{1}{2}$ inch tongue-and-groove oak floor laid over the old one. This room and also the entrance hall, formerly had a plaster (oak lath) ceiling. Beams are now exposed and painted white.

"All fireplaces, except that in the southeast room, have been bricked up. The openings averaged about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide and 3 feet high in the clear.

"A modern bathroom has been installed in front of second floor hall.

"Roof rafters, tie beams and uprights are original. All of this work is mortised and fastened together with wood pins. The two smaller openings at each gable have been blocked up with stone. The original wood shingle roof of the main portion of the house, and also the entrance porch roof have been replaced

The Isaac Varian Homestead

by asbestos shingles.

"Much of the existing hardware is the original
hand-wrought iron."

Compiled, May 4, 1934, by

Thomas W. Hotchkiss

Thomas W. Hotchkiss,
118 Pine Street,
Peekskill, New York.

Approved,

Mrs. Duvey Intu

Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.